

## UNITED STATES SECURITY STRATEGY TOWARDS CUBA

BY

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**UNITED STATES SECURITY STRATEGY TOWARDS CUBA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The movie *Charlie Wilson's War* illustrates the tragic void in U.S. policy that followed the Soviet Union's departure in 1987 and set the conditions on September 11, 2001, for the worst attack in U.S. history. Yet Afghanistan lies 6,700 miles from America's shores. What predictions can we make from a similar relationship with Cuba that lies only 90 miles from Florida? Foreseeing a Cuban attack is not the message. Instead I'm suggesting that promoting a secure and stable Cuba ensures U.S. security in the region. Why then do we continue to support a failed 50-year Cold War foreign policy that has done little in a post Cold War Cuba to remove the Castro regime or change the Cuban government? Raul Castro's assumption to power in 2006 is unremarkable by itself except to highlight that change in Cuba is on the horizon and shaping that change is in the U.S. National Interest. This research paper will analyze the old policy and suggest a new foreign policy, yet to be decided by a new administration at a critical juncture in U.S. - Cuba relations.

## UNITED STATES SECURITY STRATEGY TOWARDS CUBA

The United States seeks a new beginning with Cuba. I know that there is a longer journey that must be traveled to overcome decades of mistrust, but there are critical steps we can take toward a new day. I've already changed a Cuba policy that I believe has failed to advance liberty or opportunity for the Cuban people. We will now allow Cuban Americans to visit the islands whenever they choose and provide resources to their families — the same way that so many people in my country send money back to their families in your countries to pay for everyday needs. Over the past two years, I've indicated, and I repeat today, that I'm prepared to have my administration engage with the Cuban government on a wide range of issues — from drugs, migration, and economic issues, to human rights, free speech, and democratic reform. Now, let me be clear, I'm not interested in talking just for the sake of talking. But I do believe that we can move U.S.-Cuban relations in a new direction.

—President Barack Obama

### Why Should the U.S. Change its Policy Towards Cuba?

President Obama's remarks above held at the Summit of the Americas on 19 April 2009, suggest that "a new beginning with Cuba" is coming. Among his first actions after assuming office was to remove existing restrictions on Cuban American travel to Cuba – his comments and actions seem to indicate at least a desire to change the U.S.-Cuba status quo. Since 1960, U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba has been economic embargo and diplomatic isolation imposed to isolate, contain and weaken the Castro regime.<sup>1</sup> Our purpose was to oust the Castro regime and establish a democratic government in Cuba. Today, 50 years later, our purpose, policy, and the Cuban Regime remain unchanged.

So why would the Obama Administration add the Cuban-relations conundrum to an already ambitious first term in office replete with issues like the economic recession, two wars, and health care reform? Perhaps one reason may be timing. Fidel Castro's succession by his brother Raul in 2006 implies after 47 years some movement towards

reforming Cuba's repressive government is possible. Even the 78-year-old Raul, "reportedly not in the best health," his government elite averaging above 70, implies a significant change in Cuba's leadership once his term ends in 2013.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps goodwill overtures expressed by President Obama will not be reciprocated while Fidel retains tremendous influence as the first secretary of the Communist Party.<sup>3</sup> Moving "U.S.-Cuban relations in a new direction" requires building foreign relations that haven't existed in 50 years. President Obama's seemingly selfless overtures could represent a strategic message to the Cuban government that is heard and perhaps receives traction when Cuba's leadership can pursue a course without Fidel Castro's influence.

At the international political level, President Obama sees resuming relations with Cuba as a real step towards multilateralism and leadership. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made the following statement about then President-elect Barack Obama's national election. "He spoke about a "new era of global partnership...I am confident that we can look forward to an era of renewed partnership and a new multilateralism."<sup>4</sup> To highlight this point further, U.N. nations have voted overwhelmingly since 1992 to overturn the Cuban Embargo. In 2007, 184 nations voted against the embargo<sup>5</sup> - a powerful statement about U.S. unilateralism with regards to Cuba. The argument can also be made that the U.S. has foreign relations with China, Saudi Arabia and other non-democratic governments while applying a different standard towards Cuba. With growing perception that Cuba no longer poses a credible threat to the U.S., it appears that U.S. policy has changed from coercive to punitive following the end of the Cold War. With a renewed focus on multilateralism, President Obama could go a

long way to break this image by spreading the seeds of a “new beginning” in U.S.-Cuba relations.

While dismissing Cuba’s immediate security threat to the U.S., we cannot ignore their 90-mile proximity to the U.S. shore. As we struggle to contain the illegal Mexican exodus into the U.S. and all the security concerns it poses, we neglect to see the historical similarities in past encounters with the Cuban government that led to similar incursions. So if we critically reexamine the current U.S. – Cuba embargo, why does the U.S. believe it will only lead to Cuban democratization? What about government collapse? A Cuban government collapse akin to Somalia could create a significant refugee situation not to mention an implied U.S. responsibility to provide humanitarian and even stability operations in Cuba. If catastrophe does occur, a search for causes would certainly lead back to our punitive approaches to U.S. diplomacy towards Cuba.

On the other hand, consider that foreign diplomacy achieves a breakthrough under Raul’s Cuba. It could certainly hedge our influence in Latin America. According to Dr. DeShazo, “close bilateral relationships with Venezuela is a product of Fidel Castro-Hugo Chavez friendship and does not enjoy much popular support in Cuba-nor with Raul.” If true, perhaps having a U.S. - Cuba option can become an alternative to that relationship post Fidel Castro. Loosening or lifting the embargo could also be mutually beneficial. Cuba’s need and America’s surplus capability could be mutually beneficial and eventually addictive to Cuba. Under these conditions, diplomacy has a better chance to flourish. If negotiations break down and a decision to continue the embargo is reached, international support would be easier to garner.



Almost 21 years since the wall fell in Berlin, it is time to chip away at the diplomatic wall that still remains between U.S. and Cuba. This paper will further define our interests in Cuba and why President Obama should continue his quest for renewed diplomatic relations with Cuba. It will discuss potential risks associated with retaining the current 50-year diplomatic policy and give some broad suggestions regarding a new U.S. – Cuba foreign policy.

### Policy and National Interest

Present U.S. policy towards Cuba is economic isolation imposed via embargo to coerce Cuba into establishing a representative government. While the basic policy remains unchanged, the same is not true about U.S. interests in Cuba. During the Cold War, stated U.S. interest was to contain Communism, the leading edge of which was Cuba. More than anything the U.S. wanted Castro's demise but international support hinged on preventing the spread of communism. After 1989, communism was under siege and capitalism was on the rise. U.S. interests now shifted towards peace and regional stability. Of course, removing the Castro regime was still the preferred method, but without Soviet collusion Castro's Cuba was no longer a credible threat to the U.S. Not surprisingly, international support quickly dwindled leaving the U.S. as the unilateral enforcer. In hindsight many argued it was the right time to loosen the embargo and seek better relations with Cuba. Instead, a renewed passion to topple Castro and establish democracy fractured any hopes to rekindle relations. In retrospect, Kennedy could not have foreseen a 50-year embargo that survives the Soviet Union's demise but fails to remove Castro. The same cannot be said about the Obama Administration

today. This section will analyze U.S. – Cuba policy, past opportunities and ultimate failure over the past 50 years.

From 1959 to 1964, beginning with President Eisenhower but shaped primarily by the Kennedy Administration, U.S. policy was to remove Fidel Castro and establish Democracy in Cuba.<sup>6</sup> It can be argued that this policy resonates today but during the early period the U.S. actively pursued removal as the decisive action that would lead to Democracy in Cuba. Political and military efforts to remove Castro in 1961 were reinforced by the initial embargo implementation and tightening that was most effective. Between 1965 and 1970, U.S. attempts to maintain a multilateral embargo failed and its effectiveness withered as western governments refused to acquiesce to U.S. - led sanctions. By the time the OAS officially lifted the embargo, Cuba had successfully diversified its trade portfolio and by 1974, 45% of Cuba's exports came from western governments.<sup>7</sup>

The period 1965-1972, although officially endorsing the previous administration's tough stance, largely ignored its neighbor while it dealt with the more pressing conflict in Viet Nam. Containment and a period of Presidential ambivalence towards Cuba allowed tensions to cool between nations. This coupled with a growing fatigue with the Viet Nam War resulted in a renewed engagement to normalize relations with Cuba. A policy of "rapprochement" or normalization began with the Nixon Administration and received promising traction under the Carter Administration in 1977. The rapprochement period, 1973 – 1980, was President Carter's attempt to curtail communism in Africa and Latin America. By normalizing relations with Cuba, President Carter could leverage this good will to reverse Cuban presence in Ethiopia, Angola and Zaire. Several overt measures

were taken to reduce embargo restrictions and in February, 1977 State Department spokesmen Fred Brown “publically acknowledged and accepted a Cuban proposal to begin bilateral talks on maritime boundaries and fishing rights.”<sup>8</sup> In June, U.S. National Security Council decided to end the practice of blacklisting foreign ships that called on Cuban ports. Perhaps the most notable improvement that year was to allow foreign diplomats to occupy each other’s embassies. This allowed direct communication between countries; the previous practice had been to use Swiss and Czech proxies.<sup>9</sup> But strong Congressional opposition against normalizing relations took center stage during the 1980 presidential elections. Several incidents including the “Soviet Brigade” and the “Mariel Boatlift” in 1980 intensified this opposition and quickly derailed Carter’s initiatives in Congress.

As President Reagan took office in 1980, U.S. – Cuba relations had already soured. The Reagan Administration would reinforce the weakened embargo and a return to a containment strategy under the auspices that Cuba was “promoting terrorism and subversion in virtually every Latin American country”.<sup>10</sup> The White House policy was to “disrupt and destabilize the island’s economy, terminate the Cuban-Soviet alliance, end Cuba’s internationalism, and finally reinsert Cuba within the capitalist political-economic orbit.”<sup>11</sup> President Reagan made every attempt to return to an “airtight” embargo but Cuba’s persistent trade with the west subverted the effort. In fact, British and Canadian companies could conduct trade in “America’s back garden without having to compete with U.S. companies.”<sup>12</sup> Reagan did however, exact a toll on Cuba’s economy by preventing other nations from allowing Cuba to reschedule its debt: “a process of negotiating new loans to replace existing obligations, either by lengthening

maturities, deferring of loan principal payment.”<sup>13</sup> This action compelled Cuba to make its most overt concessions towards normalizing U.S. - Cuban relations. Castro removed troops from Africa and reclaimed 2,700 Cuban refugees that had departed to America during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift. Castro even allowed a U.S. Human Rights delegation to visit prisoners in Cuba. In return, the Reagan and Bush Administrations made no significant concessions to Cuba and status quo between countries remained.

The last meaningful opportunity for change occurred after the fall of the Berlin Wall and particularly the window it presented the U.S. following the collapse in Soviet – Cuba relations. During the period 1990 – 1993, internal and economic turmoil following the Soviet Union’s break-up led to a drastic cut in Soviet subsidies and trade relations with Cuba.<sup>14</sup> This led to a 34% drop in Cuban economy forcing Castro to renew western trade options and relook his own draconian business and commercial practices. The first Bush Administration passed on this precious opportunity, ignoring Cuba’s overt concessions late in the previous administration and choosing instead to enact the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act reversing Carter’s amendment to allow third country U.S. companies from trading with Cuba.<sup>15</sup>

By the time President Clinton came to office, momentum had already shifted in Cuba's favor. Cuba’s economy began to rise in 1994 reaching its apex in 1996 with a 41% increase thanks to foreign investments in tourism. The introduction of the Helms-Burton legislation in 1996 gained Congressional traction after the Cuban Air force shot down two, anti-Castro “Brothers in Rescue,” planes over Cuba. The Helms-Burton Act created unrealistic expectations for the Cuban government before U.S. would loosen restrictions with Cuba. A total of eight requirements had to be met and the most

controversial of these included; a transitional government in place unlike the Castro regime; the dissolution of the Department of State; Cuba must hold free and fair elections and a controversial property law that allowed property owners that left Cuba as early as 1959, to make claims in U.S. Courts on that property. With Cuba's economy on the rise, this new measure to tighten the noose failed terribly and only succeeded in further alienating both governments.

The second Bush Administration did little to engage Cuba and after September 11, 2001, was completely engrossed in the War on Terror. U.S. policy towards Cuba has changed little in 50 years. Although the embargo continues to fail despite our best efforts to tighten it, our policy has remained steadfast and the U.S. is no closer to normalizing relations with Cuba.

#### A History of Anger and Distrust

After 50 years, deep-seated distrust and anger exists between the U.S. and Cuba. Perhaps an obvious assessment, but one that if ignored could undermine attempts to repair diplomatic relations between countries. Several diplomatic pitfalls developed over the years could hinder any attempt to reestablish relations. They could spell disaster and set an already tenuous relationship back decades. These triggers are subtle but recognizable over a long and tumultuous period in U.S. – Cuba relations. A historical account will help identify these political impasses and create favorable conditions for diplomatic success in future U.S. – Cuba relations.

Experts argue over who's started the dispute between nations: was it the Cuban Agrarian Reform Act in 1959 that nationalized agrarian land in Cuba to include U.S. owned lands? Could it have been Cuba's decision to resume trade with the Soviet

Union that led to a U.S. imposed embargo on Cuba in 1960? Perhaps the bigger issue was how diplomatic, economic and military efforts by both countries continued to aggravate already strained relations.<sup>16</sup> In 1961, Cuban exiles supported by the Central Intelligence Agency failed to topple the Castro government. The Bay of Pigs fiasco sent Cuba a clear signal that the U.S. was not interested in negotiation. Castro answered immediately by allowing Soviets to position nuclear missiles in Cuba, threatening U.S. vital security and leading to the Cuban Missile Crises. These intentions have survived to the present undermining any attempt to pursue common interest and reduce tensions. The underlying fear that U.S. remains committed to toppling the Cuban government constitutes the first diplomatic pitfall in U.S. – Cuban relations. For this very reason, democratic reform will not succeed as a diplomatic bargaining tool with Cuba. Suspicions run deep among Cuban leaders and any inferences to government reform, albeit noble, will impede meaningful relations. Human rights advocacy, free trade and limited business opportunities in Cuba may be more plausible and could eventually encourage the long-term changes U.S. wants in Cuba.

The embargo itself remains a perpetual albatross that continues to undermine any real diplomatic progress between nations. A series of coercive measures designed to topple the Castro regime began with U.S. – led efforts to expel Cuba from the Organization of American States (OAS) in January 1962 followed by trade prohibitions on imports and exports to Cuba by the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).<sup>17</sup> This was achieved by leveraging an existing 1954 OAS Caracas Resolution designed to prevent trade with communist countries called Trading with the Enemy.<sup>18</sup> After bilateral sanctions are established, U.S. pursued broader international support by

enacting the October 1962 Battle Act prohibiting U.S. assistance to any country that traded with Cuba. An early attempt to persuade the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) nations to comply with the embargo yielded limited success.<sup>19</sup> However, a new perceived security threat brought on by the Cuban Missile Crises in late 1962 gave U.S. the leverage it needed in February 1964 to convince NATO nations to effectively cease trade with Cuba. In July 1964, OAS followed NATO's lead; U.S. had succeeded in isolating Cuba from its western traders.<sup>20</sup>

Tightening the noose placed extraordinary economic pressure on Cuba considering U.S. multilateral efforts reduced western trade by 73% in 1964. Cuba was obliged to subsidize this deficit with the Soviet Union and China between 1961 – 1973. This trend continued by enticing Latin American and other western countries like Canada and England in the 1980s and following the Soviet fall in the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> Commensurately, Presidential administrations have loosened and tightened the embargo repeatedly as the climate between nations improved or deteriorated. The Cuban Defense Act in 1992 and the Helms Burton Act in 1996 tightened embargo restrictions signaling continued U.S. intentions to remove the Castro regime. But the U.S. - led embargo played right into Castro's hand. Castro accused the U.S. calling it "another economic aggression" and stating that Cubans would have to undergo "long years of sacrifice."<sup>22</sup> By demonizing U.S. policy, he was able to galvanize Cuban support during the toughest times. The embargo helped create the American enemy, removing any popular support for rebellion and elevating Castro's struggle to a legitimate Cuban struggle.

Castro was also complicit in the failure to mend U.S. – Cuba relations. His continued attempts to export communism began in Africa with a total 55,000 troops in Angola and Ethiopia by 1978. He focused efforts closer to Latin America by supporting Puerto Rican independence movement in 1975, the Sandinistas overthrow in Nicaragua in 1979 and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador. Cuba's support to Columbia's M19 (Columbian Election Day April 19, 1970) guerilla movement labeled Cuba a "state sponsor of terrorism" in 1982.<sup>23</sup> Castro's expansion efforts fueled U.S. security paranoia and prevented several overt efforts by the Carter Administration to improve relations with Cuba. In April 1980, an incident at the U.S. Mission in Havana led 120,000 Cubans to depart Mariel Port by boat to the U.S.<sup>24</sup> The incident better known as the "Mariel Boatlift" became the tipping point that inhibited further relations with Cuba.

Despite the growing tensions between the U.S. and Cuba, trade between the west and Cuba increased. NATO compliance with U.S. - brokered trade restrictions broke down after 1966 in particular due to British and Canadian opposition. U.S. efforts to use the OAS embargo to influence the United Nations also failed. In 1974, Latin American leaders pushed to end the OAS embargo. In 1975 the OAS lifted the embargo with Cuba and the embargo returned to a bilateral embargo now condemned by most western countries.<sup>25</sup> In 1982, Cuba's failing economy led Castro to pursue western trade with a renewed vigor. By "1987, more than 370 firms from twenty-three European, Latin American, and Asian countries participated in Cuba's largest ever annual trade fair."<sup>26</sup>



Castro's interest in improving U.S. - Cuba relations was perhaps the greatest from 1982-1988. Castro made statements in 1982 to resume talks with the U.S.; he took back more than 1000 Mariel Boatlift criminals that came to the U.S. in 1987 and pulled troops out of Angola in 1988 to mention a few. These rare moments and apparent seams in Castro's armor were left unanswered by the Reagan and Bush Administrations. Instead renewed efforts to continue ratcheting a now largely ineffective bilateral embargo served only to increase animosity between both countries.

It is difficult to quantify, but essential to note, that U.S. action over the years seems to support a hatred for Fidel Castro that interferes with any attempt to established diplomatic relations with Cuba. If true, to neglect this assumption could undermine any efforts to reverse our seemingly punitive approach. Perhaps it can be traced to his support for a Soviet-style communism. After all, few things in 1960 America were feared and despised more than communism. Any country affiliated with the communist movement became an affront to the American way of life. Furthermore, Americans shed blood in Cuba during the 1898 Spanish American War leading to Cuban Independence in 1902.<sup>27</sup> Fidel Castro became evil's face in Cuba and any attempt to partner with Castro seemed equally tainted. Fast forwarding to the present, with communism no longer a threat, perhaps it's time to let the anger fade and deal with Cuba for its' diplomatic merit not past indiscretions. The question remains whether clear objectiveness leads U.S. diplomatic efforts with Cuba? It is important to note that what's at stake here is U.S. national interests and not the legacy of Fidel Castro.

Another important pitfall is to exploit democracy as a precondition for diplomacy and economic engagement in Cuba. If democracy is virtuous, then why must we exploit

it? It casts a negative shadow on a positive change in government. There is a common perception that U.S. policy with regards to security and stability can only exist under the precondition of a “Democratic Cuba”. It has prevented any real progress in U.S. – Cuba relations because of well placed fears that we mean to subvert the Cuban government. A popular Cuban American lobby group, The Cuban American National Foundation summarizes traditional U.S. beliefs towards Cuba. They suggest, “U.S. – Cuba policy should focus on (1) advancing U.S. interests and security in the region and (2) empowering Cuban people in their quest for democracy and prosperity...that these are “intertwined and one cannot be individually accomplished without the other.”<sup>28</sup> The recommendation then focuses largely on steps to pursue a democratic Cuba.

To separate security and stability from democratic pursuits in Cuba could benefit both causes. Focusing on better diplomatic relations could further democracy as a byproduct of increased exposure to open markets, businesses and globalization. China is a good example. The U.S. has diffused tensions with China by exposing them to open markets. Although they continue to embrace communism, their version of communism has been somewhat diluted as they modified their business practices, trade and other aspects to compete in the global marketplace. If you take into account that Cuba's Growth National Product (GDP) decreased by 4% since 2006 while their debt grew by 16% to almost \$20B in 2008, Cuba certainly has incentive to do the same.<sup>29</sup> By imposing democracy we jeopardize diplomatic avenues to our principal security and stability pursuits. To assuage the Cuban America position on this issue may be simpler today than 10 years ago. Today's younger Cuban-American generation is more amenable to closer relations with Cuba. The anger carried by their immigrant forefathers

after 50 years may be passing and perhaps the time is right to leverage this new Cuban American generation to open dialogue with Cuba without the democratic preconditions tied to negotiations.

As we pursue diplomatic relations with Cuba we should not expect full disclosure, immediate results and a Cuban government anxious to please the U.S. We should expect a cautious and limited first engagement that appears noticeably weighted in U.S. effort. Let us assume the U.S. makes significant diplomatic and economic concessions but Cuba is less willing to provide some reciprocal offering. U.S. policy could conclude that Cuba has no genuine desire to consummate new diplomatic relations and diplomacy could fail. It is imperative to understand that the U.S. has done most of the “taking” and hence will, at least for the near future, do most of the “giving”. A steady, patient and continued engagement is needed until Cuba has the confidence to commit to further diplomatic relations.

#### Current U.S.-Cuba Policy Analysis

Understanding the deep-seated animosity and distrust that continues to fuel U.S. - Cuba tensions will aid us in properly analyzing the feasibility, acceptability and suitability (FAS) of current and future U.S. policy with Cuba. Identifying FAS applications to diplomacy, information, military, economic, finance, intelligence and law enforcement (DIME-FIL) will highlight weaknesses in current U.S. – Cuba relations that can be modified for future improvement.

The logical question with regards to current U.S. – Cuba policy is whether it's feasible to continue the current policy. At least for the foreseeable future, the answer is yes. It equates to doing nothing diplomatically, militarily and economically. Perhaps this

option is appealing given a robust domestic agenda and U.S. involvement in two wars. According to Professor Schwab and other experts however, the U.S. has lost the information campaign targeted at the Cuban people. It has only, “buttressed Fidel's popularity in Cuba and elsewhere, which eviscerates the very purposes the embargo was set up for.”<sup>30</sup> It's like the classic biblical story of David triumphing over Goliath – the bigger the oppressor the greater the victory. True or not, Fidel has made the case successfully to the Cuban people. While it's feasible for the U.S. to pursue the current course there is no evidence it will succeed.

How acceptable is it to U.S. foreign policy? There are three elements of national power that highlight our current policy: diplomacy, economy and law enforcement. It is subjective to evaluate acceptability strictly in terms of current national power invested and subsequent pay offs in foreign policy. U.S. needs international cooperation to achieve the coercive effects that only complete economic strangulation can accomplish. This is tough to do and North Korea and Iran bear this true. If we look at it from a broader international and economic perspective we can begin to see why it's not acceptable. Take a UN General Assembly vote renouncing the U.S.-led embargo on Cuba for instance; since 1992 there has been overwhelming vote to end the embargo.<sup>31</sup> In essence, it has garnered sympathy for Castro and encouraged western nations like Canada and Spain to continue open relations with Cuba. Even if the embargo could work, U.S. diplomacy has failed to yield the international tourniquet needed to bring change in Cuba. Applying economic force without first garnering the necessary diplomatic support failed to achieve intended changes succeeding instead in hurting the Cuban people it hoped to protect. Whether or not an embargo can work in Cuba is

suspect but succeeding without international support is impossible. Since the embargo hinges on a larger multinational participation, international and not just U.S. acceptability is necessary to achieve U.S. ends in Cuba.

Several embargo refinements over the years like the Libertad Act have further tightened restrictions on Cuba. These restrictions have placed a heavy burden on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) particularly in Miami. A 2007 GAO report highlights these burdens and how they impede other more important Law Enforcement activities in defense of the homeland.<sup>32</sup> GAO findings suggest there's a real need to balance U.S. paranoia for "everything Cuba." This rebalancing purports an unacceptable cost-benefit to the current law enforcement aspect of the embargo. It diminishes our greater need to defend against terrorist, criminals and other real threats to our national security. In essence, our efforts to impose embargo restrictions are unacceptable tradeoffs for homeland security.

In the final analysis, U.S. – Cuba policy is not sustainable because it has failed to meet desired national ends: Cuban democracy and human rights. Prior to 1989, the U.S. could make the argument that the embargo contained communism and generally marginalized the Castro government. It failed however, to depose Fidel Castro and democratize the Cuban government. A post Cold War Cuba no longer poses a threat to the U.S. - communism is contained and Cuba is still under embargo. Despite a 50-year failure to affect change in Castro's government, our policy with regards to Cuba remains unchanged. We have foregone diplomatic engagement and chosen coercive economic power as our only political tool.

### Does Cuba Pose A Security Threat to the U.S.?

Let's begin by asking this question: can we afford to escort commerce through Caribbean waters from Cuban pirates? This sounds as farfetched as an attack from an Afghan-based Al-Qaida using commercial airliners to destroy the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. This scenario while unexpected is completely contrary to our policy objectives in Cuba. The greater possibility that "something" unfavorable happens in Cuba that threatens U.S. national interests is certainly more relevant. Although Cuba poses no traditional threats to the U.S., geographically, their 90-mile proximity should concern us. Our proximity to Cuba assures U.S. involvement, be it voluntary or involuntary, in a major crisis. Consider a disease outbreak that begins in Cuba over a break down in hygiene, government pollution or other misfortune attributable to economic strife. The disease has no boundaries and quickly reaches the Florida shores via travelling Cuban American citizens. This scenario could be mitigated or even preventable under the auspices of better relations. Aside from the obvious medical benefits a partnership provides, established communications with Cuba would likely prevent an uncontrolled spread in the U.S. There are definite advantages to having healthy regional partnerships to deal with regional problems.

While economic pressure has failed to bring about government change, it could trigger a government collapse. If Cuba becomes a "failing" or "failed state" we could see a huge refugee flood into the U.S., increased crime and drug trafficking across U.S. borders, and renewed security and stability issue in the region. In 1980, 120,000 Cuban refugees fled Mariel and 20,000 more in 1994 after Cuba declared an open immigration

policy.<sup>33</sup> From 2004 – 2007, 131,000 Cubans have made residence in the U.S. Almost 38,000 settled in Florida alone in 2006. Although it's mere speculation to presume Cuba will fail, if it did, there is no question where Cubans would seek refuge. A failed state could eventually draw U.S. involvement into nation building in Cuba taking a greater toll on our national resources. This scenario, while unexpected, is completely contrary to our policy objectives in Cuba. Current U.S. policy is no longer a sustainable option to achieving our national interests in Cuba. Until realignment can bring national policy back in line with national interests, conditions will not exist for real change in U.S. – Cuba relations.

#### Proposed U.S.-Cuba Policy Analysis

If today marks President Obama's "new strategy" towards Cuba we must begin with U.S. National interests in the broader Latin American context. Over the past 50 years our approach has been germane to Cuba and not the larger Latin American construct. In so doing we have isolated Cuba from Latin America for coercive reasons yes, but also for the very democratic principles we hoped Cuba would follow.

The State Department's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (covers Canada and Cuba) has set the following goals for the region: "Economic partners that are democratic, stable, and prosperous; Friendly neighbors that help secure our region against terrorism and illegal drugs; Nations that work together in the world to advance shared political and economic values."<sup>34</sup> To simplify these goals, let us just say stability, economic prosperity and democracy. Using these as a benchmark, I propose our new diplomatic strategy towards Cuba must be similar - achieve economic stability, security and a representative government as the "end state" goal and not the prerequisite for

engagement. President Obama can implement this policy by first building American and Congressional support for engagement. He should establish a formal infrastructure that communicates to Cuba and the International Community at large that we're serious about diplomatic engagement with Cuba. Finally, we must loosen embargo restrictions and expose Cubans to U.S. open markets, business opportunities and 21<sup>st</sup> Century living. This combination will improve relations with Cuba by regaining their trust, improving their living conditions and exposing them to the democratic enticements we hope they will emulate.

Achieving Congressional approval will be difficult although not impossible in the present economic recession. The economic benefits associated with new business opportunities in Cuba can encourage skeptics in Congress to mobilize. As a counterargument to a continued embargo, the President can point to the dangers associated with failed states like Somalia inadvertently caused by the very environment sanctions create. A strong communication strategy to gain American support coupled with a softening Cuban American stance, shrouded in economic opportunity, could encourage Congressional dialogue and resolution. President Obama can succeed if he sets realistic goals and expresses these to the American public before the media or his opposition defines these.

We've established that coercive means have failed to achieve democracy and economic stability in Cuba. I'm suggesting there is another mutually beneficial alternative. Using China as an example, their exposure and need to compete in free global markets broadened their horizons and shifted their hard line communist approach to international diplomacy. This was a feat that coercive diplomacy has not



accomplished in Cuba. Yet we still have civil disagreements with China on human rights issues, Taiwan's right to independence and other contentious issues without resorting to coercive measures. Why should Cuba receive different treatment? The confusion lies with our tendency to impose democracy as a precondition for diplomatic relations. How can Cuba subscribe to small business practices, a free economy building block, if business opportunities are not available? Diplomatic engagement and economic encouragement has a better chance. Cuba's economic condition incentivizes their willingness to begin diplomatic negotiations. The U.S. should begin by focusing efforts to establish diplomatic relations through incentives rather than coercion. We must also set the democratic precondition aside to pursue when the relationship matures and trust is reestablished. Exposing them to new opportunities will eventually, through their own discovery and U.S. shepherding, lead them to a more representative government.

If we accept that reestablishing relations with Cuba is the first real step to a democratic endstate then the first action must be to appoint an Ambassador to Cuba. This diplomatic gesture signals that U.S. is serious about foreign relations. The Ambassador's first actions must include setting the conditions with Cuba to allow a loosening of embargo restrictions. President Obama, in the spirit of multilateralism, should pursue international solidarity since some countries enjoying exclusive trade with Cuba would certainly protest the immediate competition. Choosing a time-phased removal would protect U.S. assets and interests in the remote possibility that Cuba fails to comply with the agreed bi-national or international terms. It might also sooth domestic and partisan anxiety regarding open trade with Cuba. President Obama must

accomplish this early in his first term to allow time to reap success or mitigate failure before the next elections.

The U.S. cannot afford to miss another opportunity to normalize relations with Cuba. A Cuba without Fidel is an opportunity – whether it is Raul or his replacement in 2013. The U.S. must lay the foundation today for renewed U.S. Cuba relations. Delaying could also signal the contrary to Raul Castro suspiciously awaiting the true purpose of recent U.S. concessions.

While a long term goal may be to influence change in government, it cannot be the basis for initial success and continued diplomacy. With diplomatic patience and a prosperous Cuba, we have reason to believe, like China and Russia that capitalism will prevail over communism. But new politicians and a younger generation of Americans who measure success between terms and administrations will not understand if results aren't immediate or commensurate to U.S. efforts. Instead, the strategy pursued must occur with a measured diplomatic optimism that insures immediate setbacks don't derail the restoration of trust that must occur before complete reciprocation can be expected.

### Conclusion

Today, 20 years have passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall – it's time to chip away at the diplomatic wall that still remains between U.S. and Cuba. As we seek a new foreign policy with Cuba it is imperative that we take into consideration that distrust will characterize negotiations with the Cuban government. On the other hand, consider that loosening or lifting the embargo could also be mutually beneficial. Cuba's need and America's surplus capability to provide goods and services could be profitable and

eventually addictive to Cuba. Under these conditions, diplomacy has a better chance to flourish.

If the Cuban model succeeds President Obama will be seen as a true leader for multilateralism. Success in Cuba could afford the international momentum and credibility to solve other seemingly “wicked problems” like the Middle East and Kashmir. President Obama could leverage this international reputation with other rogue nations like Iran and North Korea who might associate their plight with Cuba.<sup>35</sup> The U.S. could begin to lead again and reverse its perceived decline in the greater global order bringing true peace for years to come.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Peter DeShazo, *New Policy Direction on Cuba* (Center for Strategic and International Studies), 2006, 42.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>4</sup> U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, “Unofficial Transcript: Press encounter following the U.S. election,” November 5, 2008, linked from *UN News Centre* at “Statement Home,” [http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/sgspeeches/search\\_full.asp?statID=363](http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/sgspeeches/search_full.asp?statID=363) (accessed 7 November 2009)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Agencies Face Competing Priorities in Enforcing the U.S. Embargo on Cuba: Report to Congressional Committees* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office, November 2007), 79-80.

<sup>6</sup> The Cuban American National Foundation, “Recommendations for Cuba Policies Policy Positions,” linked from *Policy Positions*, [http://content.yudu.com/Library/A18eaz/CubanAmericanNationalFoundation/resources/index.htm?referrerUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.yudu.com%2Fitem%2Fembedded\\_reader%2F59973%2FCuban-American-National-Foundation-White-Paper%3Frefid%3D17589](http://content.yudu.com/Library/A18eaz/CubanAmericanNationalFoundation/resources/index.htm?referrerUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.yudu.com%2Fitem%2Fembedded_reader%2F59973%2FCuban-American-National-Foundation-White-Paper%3Frefid%3D17589) (accessed 1 December 2009)

<sup>7</sup> Donna Kaplowitz, *Anatomy of a Failed Embargo: U.S. Sanctions Against Cuba*, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 1998), 87.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>13</sup> Answers.com, "Rescheduling," <http://www.answers.com/topic/rescheduling> (accessed 7 December 2009)

<sup>14</sup> Donna Kaplowitz, *Anatomy of a Failed Embargo: U.S. Sanctions Against Cuba*, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 1998), 141.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 35-47.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 47-58.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 64-67.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Agencies Face Competing Priorities in Enforcing the U.S. Embargo on Cuba: Report to Congressional Committees* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office, November 2007), 70-71.

<sup>24</sup> Donna Kaplowitz, *Anatomy of a Failed Embargo: U.S. Sanctions Against Cuba*, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 1998), 104.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 90-105.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>27</sup> Timetable History of Cuba, "Struggle for Independence - Ch 5," linked from *History of Cuba*, <http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/time/timetbl2d.htm> (accessed 28 November 2009)

<sup>28</sup> The Cuban American National Foundation, "Recommendations for Cuba Policies Policy Positions," linked from *Policy Positions*, [http://content.yudu.com/Library/A18eaz/CubanAmericanNational/resources/index.htm?referrerUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.yudu.com%2Fitem%2Fembedded\\_reader%2F59973%2FCuban-American-National-Foundation-White-Paper%3Frefid%3D17589](http://content.yudu.com/Library/A18eaz/CubanAmericanNational/resources/index.htm?referrerUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.yudu.com%2Fitem%2Fembedded_reader%2F59973%2FCuban-American-National-Foundation-White-Paper%3Frefid%3D17589) (accessed 1 December 2009)

<sup>29</sup> CIA Home, "Cuba," linked from *World Fact book – Cuba*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cu.html> (accessed 1 December 2009)

<sup>30</sup> Peter Schwab, *Cuba Confronting the U.S. Embargo* (St Martin's Griffin), 1999, 183.

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Agencies Face Competing Priorities in Enforcing the U.S. Embargo on Cuba: Report to Congressional Committees* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office, November 2007), 79-80.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-69.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Agencies Face Competing Priorities in Enforcing the U.S. Embargo on Cuba: Report to Congressional Committees* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office, November 2007), 76-77.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Objectives," linked from *Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs*, <http://www.state.gov/p/wha> (accessed 15 December 2009)

<sup>35</sup> Professor Robert Coon, interview by author, Carlisle Barracks Pa, November 10, 2009.